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## Girls, Ghosts and Gelifrey Manor



ghosts,

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### Chapter 1 by Mandi Rei Serra

One

“Should we do it? I mean, we totally can, but should we?” Gabriylle Alam wondered aloud to her two compadres. At seventeen, she seemed to have a maturity far beyond her years— or at least the foresight to wonder if staying in an abandoned building was indeed a wise idea. Black hair habitually kept in a braid helped show off her stunning cheekbones and wide, amber eyes. Cedar skin set her apart from the majority of her very-Caucasian classmates. Sequestered away in Catriona’s room, homework scattered on the hardwood floor, queen-sized four poster bed hung in purple curtains, and Queen Anne style-desk, the three young ladies pulled double-duty with algebra and socialization plans. Outside the windows, wind howled and tore at the willow tree branches. To Gabi, the twitching branches seemed to echo the discontent she felt raging inside.

According to her mother, Gabi’s maturity stemmed from being raised in a multi-ethnic family which had seen its’ fair share of bullshit from xenophobic Americans. But at least Mira and Cat

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do with what they had; some would hop the bus to Concord. At least the state capital had movie theaters. As a city girl from Cambridge, Massachusetts, Gabi found herself sinking up to her elbows in small town mentality. But joining the basketball team had introduced her to the Valkyrie Mira, who in turn introduced her to Cat. Despite her Gothic exterior had a hidden sweetheart interior and sweet digs. Cat's home was a three story house with widow's walk and a suitably creepy basement. All of this paled at the thought of what shenanigans awaited Homecoming night.

Mira spoke first, cutting Cat off. She chose that moment to put her very long auburn tresses in a hastily-made bun, spitting out errant wisps that invaded her mouth as her hands whirled the hair into a coil. "Absolutely. Epic bragging rights. Everybody avoids the mansion for a reason, so we probably won't get busted. Question is, do we change out of our gowns and into something better suited for tromping around old buildings, or keep it luxe in heels for memorable photos?"

"We won't get busted as long as we don't damage any of the property." Cat lived up to her name. Parted in the center, her sleek mahogany hair fell to the middle of her back. Large gray eyes that missed nothing were fringed in black, a stark contrast to her artificially pale skin, and a mouth that preferred to keep things real. At five foot five, her lithe frame always seemed to be enveloped in the darker half of the color wheel. "My dad is okay with it. Meaning we might get checked on, so heads up. The security guards will be notified that we'll be there, so at least they won't call the cops unless we get too loud." At sixteen, Catriona Gelifrey possessed a somewhat jaded soul. Grandnana called her an old soul, but it didn't mean much to Cat. Old soul simply meant a serious demeanor, in her opinion. Her father, an attorney, gave her free run as long as she didn't sully the Gelifrey name.

"We could have a party there... have a lookout and everybody can hide if responsible adults decide to invade," Mira smiled. "It can be done!"

Cat didn't return the grin. Despite being besties with Mira for almost two years, certain aspects of Mira's brashness rubbed Cat the wrong way. "No parties. If we want to play Scooby-Dooby-Do, then we need to not mess things up or it can't happen again. This is an opportunity. Can we

not waste it?"

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at the mansion? It's be next Friday, after Homecoming." She took a bite of chicken and veggie lasagna, cringing at the tinny taste. Frozen, preassembled food was no where near as tasty as homemade.

Six foot three, two hundred pounds, and fifty years old, Paul Gelifrey was a robust specimen of humanity. A square face and long nose, his thin lips seemed out of balance with his heavy-lidded blue eyes. Dark brown hair, graying at the temples gave him a refined appearance. He defined his life by work, family, and play. Between the three choices, work and play kept his attention the most, and made up for the lack of interaction with Cat by indulging her whims. And despite his own heebiejeebies from the old mansion, he possessed no qualms about letting Cat have her own experience. "Homecoming? Are you in the running, Princess?"

Cat tried not rolling her eyes at his outdated endearment. "Not that I know of. You can consider letting me stay there as an early birthday present. Or, if you would rather, maybe my girlfriends and I can fly out to California. In San Jose, there's the Winchester Mystery House, and they do flashlight tours on Halloween. That would be awesome. Please, Dad?"

"You can stay at the old house. I was a teenager once, and did my own bit of legend tripping. But there are caveats. One, no parties. Absolutely no parties and no intoxicants. Two, no boys. It's not that I don't trust you, but I don't trust them. Three, do not damage the furnishings. While it's uninhabited, it is in good repair and is barely furnished. I don't want to drop another dime refurbishing the place. It ultimately reduces the market value for the entire property. Four, the estate security won't venture past the graveyard unless there's loud noise from the house, so keep it quiet. And lastly, you all might want to bring extra underwear, in case you shit yourselves."

Cat chuckled. "Was that the lesson you learned back in the day?"

He smirked. "That was the one lesson your grandfather failed to impart. But he gave me the same caveats. 'No parties, no girls, don't piss people off and don't trash the place.' Those were his exact words." Then the smile fell from Paul's face. "I learned not to stay there after dark. That

house is... evil. You think the basement is bad? That's nothing not compared to the sounds that will make the hair on the back of your neck stand up. It's like a thousand tiny shadows in the corners. I mean, shine a flashlight in there and it'll move. And then it moves toward you. And stay out. Trust me on this.

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“What’s in there?” Curiosity ping-ponged inside her brain. Why that specific room?

Her father cleared his throat. “The house had been closed off for years, but people would break in and stay there overnight. Or squat there, which is why I have the security detail watch the house. When I was thirteen, a group of supposed Satanists broke in and used the house to conduct their Black Masses. People and animals were slain in that bedroom. In such terrible ways that I don’t even want to think about. I don’t believe that there’s things like negative energy, but there’s something really not right about the space between those four walls. If I could brick off the room, I would. It’s where I shined a light and found darkness reaching for me. I got the hell out of there and was home by midnight. Now I only go back during the day, if at all. Your Grandnana had no problem going over there, though. Tough old bird. Damn, I miss her.”

And with those words echoing in her mind, Cat reiterated to her friends, “No boys, no loud, intoxicant-fueled festivities, and pack extra panties because it freaked my dad out big time back in the day and we might crap our pants like he did.”

Gabi nodded. “I agree, no parties. If word got out, we’d get a bunch of crashers and then we’d get to remember the night as when we were busted by the cops. Personally, I’d rather remember it as being something else. Did we want to do the electronic voice recording thing?”

Mira capitulated, her green eyes sparkling. “Can you imagine if it really is haunted and we got proof? So, make that a yes. Any proof is good proof.”

“Ever read up on the history of the mansion?” Cat asked the other two girls. They shook their heads in negative. “It’s considered haunted because a guy murdered his family and then killed himself. Back in the 1700’s... his valet found the bodies in the morning, and it was hushed up by the new owners. Rumors of sacrifice, stuff like that. Multiple instances of murder through the years. Like, up to the seventies. Dad told me that. Black Mass sort of stuff.”

Gabi asked, “How do you know all this?” Her eyes widened with pleasure at learning random facts.

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Gabi smacked her forehead. "Oh my... never made the association between the township and your last name! So, any poltergeist activity? Should we Google some ideas on how to properly hunt ghosts?"

Cat shrugged. "It was a cousin's branch of the family tree that settled the area. The ancestor that got the house after the murder still lived in England at the time, so I can't claim I'm a daughter of the township or anything like that. We're imported. And I don't know about poltergeists. What I do know is that when my dad was eighteen, he tried staying the night there before heading off to university. He couldn't make it through the night."

"Still though, must be kinda neat to have a tie to places and history." Mira and Cat looked at Gabi with questions in their eyes, so she explained, "My mother's mother was the daughter of a slave... that slave was the son of another slave. I have no idea where that side of the family comes from, no ties, no history. Not like you guys."

"What about the other side of your family?" Mira asked.

"Oh, you mean the side that gets shitty names flung at me because extremists hijacked how the media sees a region, despite my dad serving in the military and fighting for their right to say I'm a piece of shit because ancestry? Yeah, there's that, too." Bummed out, Gabi took a deep breath to calm her whirling emotions. "It's a Catch-22 of sorts. All I can do is be me, Syrian and African-American, as the poster child of the United States of Culture-Blending."

"Well, crap." Mira's frown could etch glass. "That sucks."

"There's one jerk in PE that mutters crap at me, like towel head and camel jockey. I hate it." Gabi's soulful eyes reflected her hurt. "How would he like if I held him personally responsible for the Northwestborough Baptist Church and their hateful crap? If I say get upset and say something considered too uppity, I get called an 'angry black woman,' or that I'm too emotional and blowing things out of proportion. Too sensitive to take the higher road. And if I ignore it, it just gets worse because there's nothing telling the jerk that its unacceptable. No win, either

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Gabi sighed. "Already have. Made it worse. And yes, it is him. So now I don't feed the troll, other than telling him to fuck the splintered end of a rusty shovel."

"I can punch him if you want," Mira offered. She would, too. Tall and muscular, Mira was the consummate athlete. "Real hard, in the throat. He won't be able to talk much shit after that. He can call me a hormonal bitch, and I'll agree."

Gabi frowned. "Oh, that's tempting, but I don't want you getting busted over his stupid self. He's not worth it." With the wave of her hand, she then said, "Besides, he'll reap what he sows. Karma is awesome like that."

"He may not be worth it, but the fact he's targeted you means he now has a target on his back. I promise you." Mira, like Gabi, did not grow up in Gelifrey, and had her own issues when she tried out for Gelifrey High's football team. The guys gave her hell for it, calling her dyke and lesbian, simply because she could run, throw, and receive with the best of them and wanted to demonstrate her skill. Wasn't until she showed the collection of newspaper clippings from her hometown paper in Minnesota, that she got to try out for the team. Because of the inherent sexism, Mira found herself the unofficial bench warmer. However she re-framed the situation, with her being a secret weapon only brought out when things were dire. Jack Mellan reigned as the most ardent of the vocal dissenters when it came to the intersection of traditionally masculine endeavors and femininity. Mira shut him up by running his ass down on the field during a scrimmage and tackling him, hard. Mellan and his ilk still made cruddy comments, but Mira always got hers in as retaliation. "I can strategically put a cleat somewhere tender. That's always a possibility."

Gabi smiled wide. "No need, but I appreciate the sentiment. So, just us three, or can I invite someone?"

Cat cocked an eye brow. "Who? Not saying no, just wondering who you'd like to drag along for fun."

"The new girl in homeroom. I can extend the invitation. She might decline it, though. Seems pretty shy. Having been in her shoes, I can extend a friendly invite though."

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With a shrug of her shoulders, Cat replied, "Sure, go for it. What might show up, too. He asked me out to the Homecoming." She wasn't sure if ghost hunting was his cup of tea and

hesitated to mention it to him. Oh, but she could totally get down with gyrating in his general direction.

“Oooh!” The standard squeal of female delight rent the air, emitted from both Mira and Gabi. Not so tall, not so dark, and not bad looking, Johann Schmidt had been a fixation of Cat’s since grade school.

“Hey, don’t go there.” Cat glowered, mildly irked to be put in the spotlight by her admission of going out with a longterm crush. “The stars aligned, that’s all. He’s an earth sign, too.”

Gabi quirked an eyebrow. “Going to do his chart once you find out the details needed?”

“Uh, yeah. Duh.” Cat’s penchant for astrology served as entertainment— her enthusiasm to decipher the finer meanings behind planet transits and squares yielded in much reading material. And both Gabi and Mira could acknowledge that some of the things purported by the pseudoscience seemed to hit a chord. “So, what’s the new girl’s sign? Know yet?” She addressed Gabi with a smile on her lips. “A water sign would be nice. Maybe a Pisces.”

“You could get stuck with another fire sign. Maybe ignorance is bliss?” Mira teased.

“Eh, you’re not that bad.”

Slamming her textbook closed and sliding it into her backpack, Mira retorted, “Famous last words, my friend.”

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